

FCP

The Finnish Children's Parliament

THE FINNISH CHILDREN'S PARLIAMENT

REPORT SPRING / 2008



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1. The Finnish Children's Parliament

The Finnish Children's Parliament was founded at the inaugural session held in Tampere, Finland on 9 November 2007. Altogether 372 representatives and deputy representatives from municipalities throughout Finland took part in the session. During the session, the Board and three committees were selected, and all members of the Parliament received information about the Parliament's principles and operations.

During their two-year term, the national Children's Parliament elected in Tampere will carry out their activities online under the guidance of adults.

The Children's Parliament provides children between the ages of 7-12 with a means and channel to get their voices heard, but also provides the authorities and decision-makers with a forum for discussing and clarifying issues directly with children. The aim is also to spur co-operation and ideas in order to develop the children's standing in society as well as to produce material, training and guidance to support the local education of our children in issues concerning democracy.

The activities of the Children's Parliament are intended to promote interaction between children and adults, in a way that encourages children to value themselves and their parents, and adults to value themselves and the children. The Parliament activities serve as a tool for the meeting of minds between children and decision-makers. The Finnish Children's Parliament is an organ comprised of children, and operates as a community for mutual interaction between the children themselves.

The number of local Children's Parliaments in Finland is nearing ten, and there are already youth councils or similar forums for youth to exert influence in 150 municipalities in Finland. The first Children's Parliament got underway in Tampere in 2001. The Children's Parliament Association of Finland, an organisation supported by the Finnish Ministry of Education, assists municipalities in establishing their own local activities and oversees the operations on the national level.

2. The virtual parliament provides children with a forum to prepare issues and make decisions

In its initial phase, the Finnish Children's Parliament attracted representatives from 224 of Finland's 416 municipalities.

The children live all over Finland, which makes it difficult to physically meet more than once or twice a year. For this reason, the children interact within the virtual parliament building created in the Internet during the times between their actual onsite plenary sessions.

The online parliament provides the children with up-to-date information, news and contact information, as well as tools for mutual communication. The discussion forums facilitate the exchange of thoughts and ideas regardless of the time or location of the user.

The weekly chat rooms have enabled the children to communicate in real time while adhering to a meeting agenda. In addition to the online dialogues and chat room discussions, the Finnish Children's Parliament also gathers for plenary sessions online. The online plenary sessions are organised both in the spring and autumn.

The first online plenary session was held in April 2008 and lasted for two weeks. During that time, representatives of the Children's Parliament were able to familiarise themselves with the agenda for the plenary session, initiate the discussion surrounding a particular topic, and comment on other's viewpoints.

At the end of the online session, both the representatives and deputy representatives voted on the resolutions to be sent forward to relevant bodies responsible for decisions on the issues in question. An online form was used as the voting ballot.



On 4 June 2008, Silva Järvinen, Chair of the Finnish Children's Parliament, handed the resolutions from the spring online plenary session to Thomas Blomqvist, Chairman of the Parliamentary advisory committee.

3. Background

The founding of the Children's Parliament is based on the Finnish Youth Act (Nuorisolaki 72/2006), the aim of which is to enable and promote the rights of children to be heard and participate in their community.

The establishment of the Children's Parliament supports children's involvement on the national and local level, promotes the social awareness of children and young people, and reinforces their place in society.

The activities of the Children's Parliament are also based on the UN Convention on the Rights of a Child. The convention is divided into three main themes, including the rights to **participation**, **provision** and **protection**.

4. Spring 2008 timetable

The Children's Parliament began its online activities during January-February 2008. The representatives were given usernames, and they immediately began to get acquainted with one another and discuss issues. The first organised online 'chat' meetings of the Board and committees were held in February, and they were continued weekly throughout the spring. The weekly times were set to be convenient for as many representatives as possible.

The spring activities of the online Parliament included getting acquainted with other members and the issues, and preparation for the first online plenary session. The first online plenary session was held during 17-30 April 2008. At the start of the session, an agenda containing nine items was published. The first eleven days of the session were devoted to discussion and argumentation concerning both sides of the issues listed on the agenda. The actual voting on the issues took place over the final three days of the session. The voting period was extended by ten days, until 10 May, to provide the possibility for as many members as possible to participate in the voting process.

5. The organisation of the Finnish Children's Parliament

The idea within the Finnish Children's Parliament is to direct the children's input into different groups and roles. The children can play the role of, for example, actor, definer, argumentator and, of course, decision-maker.

During the first plenary session, the children came to the decision that they could ask adults to serve as experts for the Children's Parliament. On 5-6 April, the Board of the Finnish Children's Parliament held a preparatory meeting in Jyväskylä, where 19 of the 21 representatives deliberated about the actual operational practices. The children made a list of different possible experts from whom they would like to ask advice. The list included, among others, a school cook, psychologists, politicians, as well as the elderly, such as war veterans. The children felt, however, that the adults, although involved, should allow the children plenty of latitude to make decisions from their own point of view.

The relationship between children and adults within the parliamentary activities is based on co-operation, in which the children are given sufficient space to freely form their own opinions and make decisions. The role of the adults in the parliamentary activities has been to assist and support the children in gathering information, carrying out the decision-making processes, enacting mutual interaction and implementing resolutions.

In addition to the representatives and deputy representatives in the Parliament, there are also four different groups comprised of 21 members each: the Board, the environmental committee, the leisure time committee and the school committee. More committees will be added during autumn 2008 as requested by the children.

My name is Silva Järvinen. I am the Chairman of the Finnish Children's Parliament.

Children and adults founded the Finnish Children's Parliament together on 9 November 2007. The first plenary session was held in Tampere, where the Board and first three Committees were elected. The founding of the FCP was possible only by working together.

The citizenship of a child in society requires for children and adults to work together. It also needs new kinds of structures of participation, developed especially for children, through which they can have an impact on their everyday life. From this thought the Finnish Children's Parliament was born.



SUOMEN LASTEN PARLAMENTTI

Etusivu Eteinen Kirjasto ja kokoushuone Työhuone Lepuhuone Istuntosali

lapsiedustaja Vaihda salasana Kirjautu ulos

Eteinen

- Lasten Parlamentin jäsenet
- Puheenjohtajat
- Hallitus
- Valiokunnat
- Uutiset
- Lasten Parlamentin lehti
- Yleinen keskustelu
- SLP:n esittely
- Usein kysytyt kysymykset
- Linkit
- Yhteystiedot

Järvinen Silva

Ikä	12.18 vuotta
Etunimi:	Silva
Sukunimi:	Järvinen
Syntymäaika:	17.06.1996
Asuinkunta:	Nummi-Pusula
Harrastukset:	Kansantanssi Kymmentanssi Pianon soitto, mikäli riittää tunteja.
Esittely:	Olen Silva Järvinen. Olen kiinnostunut lasten oikeuksista ja lasten parlamentin toiminnasta. Harrastan kahta tanssia. Olen reipas ja aktiivinen koululainen Nummi-Pusulasta.
Motto / slogan:	lapsillakin voi olla huono päivä.

Hallitus ja valiokunnat

- Hallitus

Introductions – one example of a contact information card from the online Parliament.

6. Preparing for the online plenary session

The preparations for the first online plenary session of the Parliament were implemented during spring 2008. The content of the agenda for the meeting was prepared online during weekly sessions over a three month period with the help of various tools and methods.

Preparations for the session were carried out by the Board, the committees, the general discussion forum for all representatives, and the initiative channel, where all representatives and deputy representatives had the opportunity to submit initiatives. The Valto website also provides any child with the opportunity to submit an initiative to the Finnish Children's Parliament. The representatives have had the ability to comment on the initiatives since April 2008.

a. Initiative channel

The initiative channel is a tool which provides every Finnish child the opportunity to submit an initiative to the Finnish Children's Parliament. Parliament members can comment on the ideas, vote on them and sign an approved initiative.

The Children's Parliament opened its own initiative channel in December 2007, and by the spring (2008) plenary session, more than 100 submissions had been made to the system. The initiatives were grouped by theme and, during its seminar, the Board of the Children's Parliament selected the two most important themes for discussion in the online plenary session.

b. Committees

The environmental, school and leisure time committees initiated their activities in February 2008, both in the discussion forum and the weekly chat sessions. The committees focused on topics that were relevant to their own area of interest. As the plenary session drew closer, the committees sought to make a summary of the discussions held since the beginning of the year. During the chat discussions held prior to the plenary session, each committee submitted to the plenary agenda two issues that the committee considered to be the most important.

c. Board

Like the committees, the Board initiated its activities in February 2008, both in a discussion forum and weekly chat sessions. The themes varied weekly between parliamentary issues and topical matters. As the plenary session drew closer, the Board sought to gather and summarise all of the discussions held since the beginning of the year.

A seminar was arranged for the Board members to meet in person in Jyväskylä on 5-6 April. At the seminar, the Board selected the matters for the plenary session that they felt were important to discuss.



The Board gathered for a seminar in Jyväskylä on 6 April 2008.

d. General discussion

In connection with the establishment of the virtual Parliament, an open and unmoderated discussion forum was established for all the representatives and deputy representatives. During the first months in operation, fairly lively discourse took place. The main point of the discussion was to get acquainted with one another. The children also used the discussion forum to present issues that were important to them, to carry out internal Gallup surveys, to gather general information and to develop the activities of the online Parliament.

In the course of the discussions, the children presented (often strongly) their own local viewpoints, but also understood the viewpoint of the national Children's Parliament, and managed to formulate opinions about matters in a way that took others into consideration.

By the start of the online plenary session, the rules and regulations for the discussion forum had already become familiar, and the representatives were able to use the forums quite effectively. During the initial phase of the online Parliament, rules and regulations concerning online behaviour and discussions within the program were presented, and the children have followed them exceptionally.

Istuntosali

- VERKKOTÄYSISTUNTO 17. - 30.4.2008
 - Äänestystulokset
 - Lähetä viesti Valtolle
 - Istunnon esityslista ja keskustelut
 - Istunnon yleinen keskustelupalsta
 - Istunnon lyhyt ohje
 - Ohje verkkotäysistuntoon
 - Istunnon CHAT
- Täysistunto Tampereella 9.11.2007

Uutiset

- » Lasten Parlamentin ensimmäinen verkkotäysistunto on päättynyt! 05.05.2008
- » Haluatko saada Lasten Parlamentin omaan kuntaasi?

Istunnon yleinen keskustelupalsta

Tälle keskustelupalstalla voi kysyä yleisiä kysymyksiä ja kertoa ehdotuksia ja ajatuksia liittyen ensimmäiseen verkkotäysistuntoon. Varsinaisen täysistunnon keskustelut löytyy esityslistan kautta!

Lisää uusi aihe

Keskustelupalstan aiheet

Tämä keskustelupalsta sisältää 59 aihetta.

Viimeisin muutos f	Aihe	Tekijä	Vs.	Viimeisin vastaus
20.05.2008, 18:29	Tytöt ja pojat erikseen liikunnassa!	Julie Luhtanen	20	Vs: Tytöt ja pojat erikseen liikunnassa! (johannes97)
20.05.2008, 12:29	Kotityöt	Tanja Valkama	9	Vs: Kotityöt (vilhelmiina2)
18.05.2008, 18:48	Aamupala	Kaisa Mikkilä	5	Vs: Aamupala (venkku)
18.05.2008, 17:54	Ikärajat	Milja Kivijärvi	30	Vs: Ikärajat (rippe96)
18.05.2008, 13:10	Koulun keittäjät	Milja Kivijärvi	5	Vs: Koulun keittäjät (kaisla)
18.05.2008, 12:34	Kouluvälitunnit	Maria Holappa	15	Vs: Kouluvälitunnit (kaisla)

Screen capture of an online plenary session discussion forum

7. Session statistics

a. New members

During the session, the system received altogether 32 requests for the renewal of usernames and messages from representatives who had not yet received their usernames. For many representatives, it seems that their activities in the Children's Parliament focus on the plenary sessions.

b. Discussion topics

A total of 93 new discussion topics were introduced through the issues on the agenda list for the plenary session. Measured by quantity, the discourse that took place during the plenary session was considerably to be more lively than that during the spring preparatory discussions.

c. Comments

A total of 1017 comments, viewpoints and arguments concerning discussion topics were received during the session. The comments were generally of high standard. Some of the representatives appeared to have commented after deep consideration about the topics, while others commented more spontaneously.

d. Messages to Valto

During the session, the children were given the opportunity to give feedback about their participation in the session and to present questions to Valto the Moose, who is the mascot of the Children's Parliament. Altogether 54 messages were submitted. The content of the messages mainly concerned statements about the children's own efforts and questions about the processes and phases of the session.

e. Voters

Altogether 214 representatives and deputy representatives participated in the voting. Given that the total number of representatives and deputy representatives is 372, the participation rate was 58%. If we only consider the representatives, the participation rate rises to 62%.



8. Session resolutions

A large number of initiatives were submitted to the Finnish Children's Parliament. The initiatives and the discussions held in the Parliament touched, to a certain extent, on the same themes. For example, discourse regarding school food and bullying were popular topics on all discussion fronts, including the initiatives, the discussion forums, the chat rooms, and the messages sent to Valto. In their meeting, the Board of the Parliament decided that they would begin to deal with the issues by discussing first those issues which were commonly considered to be of primary importance.

The children selected, either altogether or in groups, the specific issues that were considered first priority, and thus would be discussed in the online plenary session. This does not mean that those issues that were not selected would not be discussed, but, rather, they will be handled at a later date, such as at the plenary session in autumn 2008.

The plenary session began on 17 April and it comprised general open discussion forums and those that were specifically aimed at certain topics. All of the representatives received a voting ballot by e-mail. The voting period started out as the last three days of the session, but was then extended for ten days, to end on 10 May 2008.

Brief instructions for the session

"In the plenary session, we will first discuss and state our own arguments, then we will vote!

1. The discussion will take place via the online discussion forums. Each item on the agenda shall have its own discussion forum, intended specifically for discourse on the issue in question.

The general discussion forum may also be used.

You may present a new topic for discussion in the discussion forums if you have a fresh viewpoint on a certain issue. You may also comment on topics presented by others.

2. It is important to provide the reasons behind your opinion or viewpoint whenever you present it. Your reasons may be, for example, genuine knowledge about the topic, experience-based knowledge or simply a conclusion you have drawn after much consideration.

3. Once the issues have been sufficiently discussed in the discussion forums, we will move on to the voting stage.

When we move to the voting stage, all of the opinions and viewpoints presented in the discussion forums will be gathered together and, using them as a foundation, a draft resolution will be made for each item on the agenda; in other words, the issues that we will vote on will be clearly stated. This ensures that the opinions of each representative and deputy representative will be taken into consideration."

The voting ballot was drafted so that the different stands presented by the children in connection with each resolution were brought together and summarised. This was to ensure that a child who did not or was unable to participate in the session discussions, could, simply by reading the voting ballot, formulate his/her own opinion on the issue to be voted on.

Valto the Moose could also provide additional instructions and guidance. Some of the children indicated that the voting ballot was too complicated, because one had to read quite a lot of information.

It would have been simpler to give only the voting options, but then the voters would be forced to separately review the discussion held during the session if they wished to remind themselves about points that had been made by others.

The wording of the topics and concepts, and the general presentation method were seen as challenging by the children. On the basis of the general feedback, it appears, however, that the children have overcome these difficulties on their own rather successfully. On the other hand, if the children experience dissatisfaction, disappointment or problems, there has been no evidence of this presented in the feedback received to date. During summer 2008, the representatives were asked to provide open feedback concerning the course of the session, and any problem areas that arise will be dealt with before the autumn 2008 plenary session.

The online plenary session was the first of its kind. The children and the adults working in the office of the Children's Parliament can use this experience as the basis for discussion and material to develop the session practices.

The Finnish Children's Parliament made resolutions concerning nine different areas: The resolution themes were:

1. **Shall the UN Convention on the Rights of a Child serve as the foundation for the rules and regulations of the Finnish Children's Parliament?**
2. **Shall the Children's Parliament initiate co-operation with an expert network of adults?**
3. **Children's Parliament activities on the local level**
4. **New groups in the Parliament**
5. **Reducing bullying in schools**
6. **School food**
7. **Environmental issues**
8. **Leisure time**
9. **School**

9. Resolution implementation

The following are the resolutions and their implementation in accordance with the order of the agenda.

1.

Shall the UN Convention on the Rights of a Child serve as the foundation for the rules and regulations of the Finnish Children's Parliament?

What are the criteria and rules of the Children's Parliament?

*Sphere of children's rights: **PARTICIPATION***

The Finnish Children's Parliament does not as yet have rules and regulations that have been approved by the children. For this reason, it was suggested that a 'charter' or rules of operation be approved for the Parliament. There is also no generally approved definition governing the activities of the local children's parliaments. What exactly are the local parliamentary activities and what are not?

RESOLUTION: YES 95%

Rules will be established for the activities of the Finnish Children's Parliament and local children's parliamentary activities.

Altogether 5% of the respondents felt that specified rules were unnecessary. One reason presented was that "we already have been able to function without them."

The decision was also made to include the UN Convention on the Rights of a Child as part of the rules. The decision was made that the Board will name a working group for the purpose of drafting the rules.

The rule proposal will be handled for the first time at the next online plenary session and, definitively, at the plenary session in Jyväskylä. For this work, the children will receive information regarding different rules and they will be advised on, among other things, how to outline definitions.

The resolution means that the children begin a work process that includes reviewing the different sides of the issue and considering why and for what matters rules are necessary.

The rules were initially discussed in Tampere in November 2007. At that time, the specification of and guidelines concerning the representatives' activities were discussed. Due to time constraints, the session was unable to handle the rules issue to any greater degree. On the other hand, the children had not yet gained sufficient experience in Parliament activities at that time. One aspect of the rules discussion is to define the relation between the children and adults. It is also necessary to discuss what the local children's parliamentary activities are not and what they do not comprise, as well as what they should be and how they should develop.

2.

Shall the Children's Parliament initiate co-operation with an expert network of adults?

Sphere of children's rights: PARTICIPATION

Sphere of children's rights: PROVISION

RESOLUTION: YES 94%

The Finnish Children's Parliament will co-operate with a panel of adult experts who will provide information on issues under preparation. The Board will prepare the matter and invite, if necessary, the experts to co-operate with the Finnish Children's Parliament.

Altogether 6% felt that enlisting the help of experts was problematic.

Three selected comments:

"I think that it is a good idea, because then the experts can assess, for example, whether a particular initiative is realistic and whether it could be implemented."

"I think it is a good idea, but I am not sure how it would be implemented in practice. This is, after all, a children's parliament, so if the adults don't get too involved then it would be brilliant."

"An expert network would be a good thing. But they shouldn't meddle too much in system. For instance, there is an initiative to push for schools to serve unpeeled potatoes. So the experts would examine if there is even a possibility for this. Then there are all the food preservation and transport issues. So the experts would only examine whether or not the different aspects are possible. Therefore, they wouldn't participate in the decision-making process at all."

On the basis of the discussions, the co-operation with the experts will vary in accordance with different situations. Initiating co-operation with the experts might also serve as one method of exerting influence for the children. On the other hand, the definitions drafted by the children can affect decision-making, since they provide children's viewpoints on matters in a clear and concise form. The children could also conduct an online survey for respondents that are considered experts.

3.

Children's Parliament activities on the local level

*Sphere of children's rights: **PARTICIPATION***

3.1 RESOLUTION: YES 94%

The Finnish Children's Parliament will propose to those municipalities which do not, as yet, have representatives in the Finnish Children's Parliament that they elect their own representative.

A total of 6% felt that no proposals for the election of representatives were necessary.

Altogether 224 municipalities have already elected their own representatives. Participation in children's parliamentary activities is one way to help children to feel included and to give them a voice. For the purpose of implementing this resolution, the children can work co-operatively with adults, and the resolution involves a request for, among others, the Finnish Parents' Association to assist in this effort. The children can also turn to, for example, the Ombudsman for Children or the Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities, which were involved during the foundation stage in encouraging municipalities to elect their own representatives to the Parliament. The resolution means that the municipalities will be sent a request to elect a representative.

*Sphere of children's rights: PARTICIPATION***3.2 RESOLUTION: YES 85%**

The municipalities will be called upon to establish a local Children's Parliament. All municipalities will be called on to examine and, if necessary, organise a means to hear children, and the arrangement of a local Children's Parliament may be one method.

Altogether 15% felt that it is unnecessary for all municipalities to review and arrange their own methods of providing children with a voice.

The municipalities have already done a great deal of work in terms of hearing the viewpoints of children and youth through the efforts of both national and local organisations. For example, the Centre for School Clubs has been working on behalf of children and youth for years.

The Ministry of Education and the Finnish National Board of Education have been actively involved in developing the schools as an influential arena for youth. For example, the Ministry of Education's development work has produced the Participating Student - Co-Active School project, and the Finnish National Board of Education has initiated a project for arranging local children's and youth forums. Many municipalities also have active youth councils.

Very little has been done, however, for children between the ages of 7-12, and these are precisely the age groups which the children's parliamentary activities directly concern. Improvements need to be made in the degree of interaction between children and decision-makers, as well as in the target-orientation, regularity and development of the forms of discourse.

The aim is to be able to present practices for the implementation of children's right, also as they concern the aforementioned aspects, during the jubilee anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of a Child in 2009. There is still work to be done in terms of integrating the paths of influence and participation for children and youth, and of developing appropriate means of action for different age groups.

4.

New groups

Sphere of children's rights: PARTICIPATION

RESOLUTION: YES 87%

New working groups will be established within the Finnish Children's Parliament.

Altogether 13% felt that there was no need to establish new working groups. New groups will be organised to begin their activities in the autumn. The activities of the groups may later become established as committee work. New temporary discussion groups will also be established. If the activities of the groups prove to be necessary and sensible, they will become established as committees at the plenary session in Jyväskylä.

At the first plenary session of the Finnish Children's Parliament, held on 9 November 2007 in Tampere, a Board and three committees were selected for the purpose of gaining experience. The interest and need for new groups and committees was evident already at that time. Once the activities got underway, it was evident that the children were enthusiastic to form new groups. As a consequence, the resolution was made during the first plenary session.

5.

Reducing bullying in schools

Sphere of children's rights: PROTECTION

5 A RESOLUTION: YES 96%

The Finnish Children's Parliament will make a school bullying survey, which includes the following measures:

- ask authorities and organisations to name successful methods that are in place in primary schools to prevent school bullying
- gather helpful advice from adults that can be comprehensively distributed
- gather good advice from children on the issue
- ask authorities and organisations to suggest recommendations that could be made to schools and how the existing recommendations might be revised
- create a children's parliament website on the issue for adults and children

In order to implement the resolution, the adults working in the office of the Children's Parliament will compile the necessary reports.

The school bullying issue has come forth in all of the activities of the Children's Parliament including its initiatives and related commentary, messages to Valto, the discussion forums that precede the plenary session, and in the discussions of the plenary session itself. When the Board of the Children's Parliament discussed at the seminar in Jyväskylä about which issues would be dealt with at the plenary session, the minimising or prevention of school bullying rose to the forefront.

As one of the first steps in the implementation process, the office is preparing a survey asking authorities and organisations to "name successful methods that are in place in primary school to prevent school bullying". Information will be gathered from the network regarding steps that have already been taken.

5 B RESOLUTION : YES 96%

The Finnish Children's Parliament suggests that adults draw up a set of minimum recommendations to assist schools in minimising or preventing school bullying.

The Finnish Children's Parliament suggests that each school must have a clear and updated plan and policies which it follows.

With the help of experts, the Children's Parliament will formulate an understanding of the types of recommendations that could be presented to the schools and how the existing recommendations might be revised. This is one example of how to pose a question concerning recommendations: "Must a school have updated information on the degree of the school bullying?" The office of the Finnish Children's Parliament will clarify how well the issue is addressed in the training of teachers and principals, and how measures taken by the schools might be monitored.

"If the class does something fun together, maybe there wouldn't be as much bullying. One class in our school has a lot of bullying, since they never do anything together. We don't have any kind of student support group, but it might be a good idea."

"I am glad that the discussion I initiated has proceeded this far. The best way to stop school bullying is to face up to it; in other words, a wise place to start is by surveying the situation at your own school, like I did, by giving a questionnaire to all classes."

The issue will be discussed at the online plenary session held in autumn 2008. The aim is to present draft recommendations for the 2008 plenary session in Jyväskylä, and, after that, to establish recommendations for national use and to organise a method for monitoring how well the recommendations are put into use.

6. School food

*Sphere of children's rights: **PROVISION***

6 A RESOLUTION: YES 92%

The Finnish Children's Parliament will monitor how closely school food recommendations are observed and whether the school food issues improve in the near future.

Using a questionnaire, the Children's Parliament will clarify the measures and changes that have taken place as a result of the recommendations that were approved in the spring, and whether the schoolchildren feel that the recommendations have made any improvements in the school food quality.

The members of the Children's Parliament will also be asked their opinions about the school food recommendations made by the adults and the Parliament will assess how well children's opinions were taken into account by the adults who were preparing the recommendations.

On the basis of the discourse concerning this issue, it is clear that the children understand quite well the reasons behind school food arrangements, for example, the use of inexpensive solutions. The school food issue is considered important, since children spend a lot of time at school and lunch at school is, therefore, a significant part of their lives. As children spend a great deal of time at school, it is inevitable that they would also appreciate a pleasant environment in the school cafeteria.

Children are very flexible on the practical level in issues dealing with school food, although they also persistently wonder whether this or that solution might result in a more appealing or sensible result.

The school food discussion does not seem to be calming down; rather, it is a discourse that definitely needs to carry on. Children view issues concerning school food as important. A good deal of satisfaction has also been expressed in the discussions. The idea that the children would monitor the implementation of the school food recommendations is one part of the constructive discussion on the matter in which the children would like for their own viewpoint to be taken into consideration. Within the children's discussions, it has also become apparent that the children realise that they also hold a vital role through their own eating behaviours.

"It would be nice if the school offered other kinds of foods, but then that forces us to ask what those new foods might be."

"The quality of the school food should absolutely be improved. In our school, the food is sometimes cold, sometimes unsalted, or even tasteless. Children's wishes could also be integrated into the menu."

"Same here. The same menu. The same menu, the same food. The same menu, the same food, the same boredom. I have been in school for 5 years and there have only been a whopping 2 times when there wasn't the same menu and new foods were offered. Yippee! Who wants to continue eating foods that you didn't even like in the first grade??"

"...sometimes the food is kind of bad, but I don't complain, because it is also good sometimes, and if your friend says it's bad, your friend may not be right..."

"I think that the food at my school is quite good. I don't always like what they offer, but it is pretty important that the food is healthy. Once a year, my school has a heart week, when all of the food is super healthy."

*Sphere of children's rights: **PROTECTION***

6 B RESOLUTION : YES 76%

The Finnish Children's Parliament will assess in how many schools the lunch schedule is inconvenient.

A total of 24% felt that no such assessment should or needed to be done. In this respect, it seems that this issue is certainly not a problem in all schools, but when it occurs, it seems to be extremely troublesome. On the basis of the resolution, the extent of the problem will be assessed.

The Children's Parliament has discussed the reasons and factors which have led, in some cases, to practices that have been criticised. On the other hand, the children also understand the financial or operational grounds, and are often flexible enough to handle even inconvenient solutions.

"Sometimes the upper comprehensive students come to eat before we have even gotten our food. Then we only have 5 minutes to eat! That's so wrong!"

7. Environmental issues

*Sphere of children's rights: **PROTECTION***

7.1 7.1 and 7.3 RESOLUTION : YES 92%

The Finnish Children's Parliament will gather more information about environmental issues.

Background questions:

7.1. Should there be an increase in the use of wind and hydroelectric power as forms of energy production?

7.3. Should we make better use of natural gas and biofuels in vehicles?

The resolution meant that more information will be gathered regarding items 7.1 and 7.3. There has been very little information presented in the relevant discussions and the representatives were seeking additional information during the discussion. For the next phase, the Parliament will clarify the organisations and experts from whom they will request more information. At the same time, efforts will be made to find experts for the expert network of the Children's Parliament.

*Sphere of children's rights: **PROTECTION***

7.2. RESOLUTION: YES 79%

Should there be an increase in recycling and the use of recyclable materials?

I am not sure 19%.

I don't want the Children's Parliament to take a side on this issue 2%.

Discourse on the issue arose in the initiatives, environmental committee, and general discussions forums. The environmental committee selected for the agenda three questions related to the issue.

In the questions presented in the previous items of the agenda, the option for the respondent to state that he/she was unsure about his/her own position on the matter was not included. In the future, the parliamentary preparation work will also include discourse about the types of questions that should be presented for different issues. Similarly, the manner in which the entire plenary session is carried out should be discussed, in particular, now that there are new technical methods for realising the autumn session.

8.

Leisure time

*Sphere of children's rights: **PROTECTION***

*Sphere of children's rights: **PROVISION***

8 A RESOLUTION: YES 92%

There should be more cycle paths.

Altogether 8% felt that it was unnecessary to suggest an increase in the number of cycle paths.

Children use bicycles a great deal to get around, and, therefore, the cycle paths are of interest to them.

*Sphere of children's rights: **PROTECTION***

*Sphere of children's rights: **PROVISION***

8 B RESOLUTION : YES 69%

Cycle paths should be paved with asphalt.

I am not sure 18%.

I don't want to recommend the use of asphalt 13%.

In the discussion arguments, paving gained, for obvious reasons, a great deal of support, since participants expressed the arguments that asphalt is safer and easier to ride on.

The children also reflected on situations where sanding would be a good and appropriate solution. One representative even felt that splashing mud is a fun thing.

"For safety reasons, I think there should be more cycle paths. It makes no difference to me whether the path is covered with sand or asphalt. (Isn't it nice to make mud fly!)"

*Sphere of children's rights: **PROTECTION***

8 C RESOLUTION : YES 80%

The Finnish Children's Parliament suggests that schools in all municipalities hold a friendship day. The Parliament will discuss the matter, present ideas and create usable models for the realisation of a friendship day.

Altogether 20% did not view the friendship day proposal as necessary or feasible.

The background for the resolution was the argument that some children may find themselves outside of the friendship circles at school, and that measures should be taken, for example, to enable children to get to know one another. On the global scale, we have seen that even warring parties can approach one another if they are provided with sufficient opportunities for constructive discourse. Children's friendships, like friendships in general, cannot be established by force, but opportunities to get together and interact can be arranged through shared experiences.

"Many kids just want to be with one other friend and they won't let anyone else join in their games."

"I have had good friends until now, at least."

"I think that the friendship day is a good idea, because it would be nice to make new friends!"

"I think that friendship day is a really good idea! It would be important for those who don't easily make friends, or those who have difficulty meeting new people. If, for example, someone moves to a different town in the middle of the school year, and has to go to a totally different school, friendship day might be a good way to help that person make new friends. A SUPER good idea!"

9.**School**

*Sphere of children's rights: **PROVISION***

*Sphere of children's rights: **PARTICIPATION***

RESOLUTION : YES 91% **The Finnish Children's Parliament will draft a brochure concerning the "children's concept of a good yard".**

Altogether 9% did not want to make a brochure.

The brochure covers children's definitions of what a good yard might be. On the basis of the resolution, the children will independently determine and design definitions for the concept of a good yard in the form of a brochure, for the use of adult decision-makers.

10. The future of the Finnish Children's Parliament

The aim is for children in all municipalities to have the opportunity to participate in children's parliamentary activities. The idea is not for adults to teach children about the adult world, but for adults to learn about the world of children and youth. Can adults genuinely understand children's thoughts, feelings and issues? Do adults really ask for children's opinions on issues that should be jointly decided?

The most ambitious aspect of the children's parliamentary activities is the goal for adults to learn totally new ways of discussing common issues in our society. The children in the Children's Parliament also learn a great deal about the conditions and requirements by which one must act within the adult world,

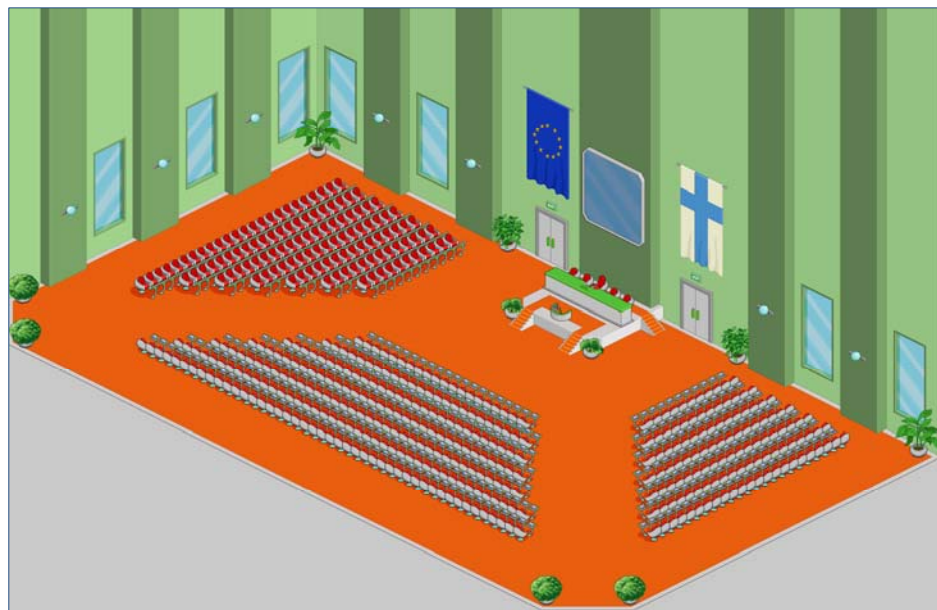
The ideal would be for children's parliamentary activities to become a natural part of the everyday activities of every school in Finland. Ideally, the children and adults would discuss the issues in a manner where children are taken seriously.

The second plenary session of the Finnish Children's Parliament will be organised in **Jyväskylä on 6-7 November 2008** in connection with the European Youth Week. The session serves as preparation for the jubilee year of the UN Convention on the Rights of a Child in 2009 with the national theme of Children's Participation. The children representatives prepare the meeting online and develop the Parliament's own activities at the same time. The children create models of operation and practices, and search for interaction methods with adults in which adults do not play a dominant role.

On the basis of the children's resolution, the adults can serve as experts for the children, but the children wish to make their own decisions.

The first term of the Finnish Children's Parliament lasts two years, from November 2007 to October 2009. Autumn 2009 will see the election of new representatives who will begin their own two-year term at the plenary session scheduled for November 2009.

The Finnish Children's Parliament is presently constructing a new online parliament, which will be implemented using 2D flash technology to create a two-dimensional online building where interaction is easier and more efficient.



11. Forms of influence

The central objective of the Finnish Children's Parliament is to promote the establishment and continued activities of local Children's Parliaments. Local Children's Parliaments can drive local initiatives for consideration by the local government and authorities.

In the Finnish Children's Parliament, the children

- prepare issues online
- hold online plenary sessions
- gather together for onsite plenary sessions
- meet, as part of the Board or other groups, other than just online
- can participate in training sessions online
- can participate in a variety of capacities (as members of a committee or working group, as journalists, information officers, reporting members)
- issue resolutions and other opinions and publish reports on meetings, and compile an annual children's report from Finland

The children can

- make resolutions
- make initiatives
- set definitions of what children consider to be good (such as a good yard)
- make statements
- make poems, drawings, songs...
- pose questions
- make proposals
- hold press conferences
- conduct questionnaires online, reports
- make interviews and give interviews
- publish information about issues in their own media outlet, the website
- reward, thank, raise positive matters
- arrange visits in desirable locations
- receive guests online
- ask other children or adults to join a discussion or meeting
- request that adult experts clarify issues or take a standpoint on the children's ideas or outlooks (who the experts support, who they oppose – why?)
- tell about their own municipality to other children and adults
- gather together all of the children's ideas and viewpoints.

On the basis of their own resolutions, the children carry out internal discussions on the forms of influence for the Finnish Children's Parliament. In autumn 2008, the children will determine exactly how adults can and cannot participate in the parliamentary work. The discussion will also define what local children's parliamentary activities are and are not.

12. Supportive and co-operative partners

President of the Republic

President of the Republic **Tarja Halonen** serves as the patron of the Finnish Children's Parliament.



SÄHKETERVEHDYS

Sydämelliset onnittelut ensimmäiselle Suomen Lasten Parlamentille.
Toivotan menestystä tärkeässä tehtävässä.

Tarja Halonen
Tasavallan presidentti

Parliamentary advisory committee

The advisory committee appointed by the parliamentary groups in the Finnish Parliament serve as an advisory and consultative partner to the Finnish Children's Parliament. Parliamentary members serving on the committee:

- Thomas Blomqvist**, Chairman, Tammisaari, Swedish Parliamentary Group
- Jukka Gustafsson**, Tampere, Social Democratic Parliamentary Group
- Kari Kärkkäinen**, Varkaus, Christian Democratic Parliamentary Group
- Marja Kyllönen**, Suomussalmi, Left Alliance Parliamentary Group
- Pertti Salovaara**, Lempäälä, Finnish Centre Party
- Sanna Lauslahti**, Espoo, National Coalition Party
- Johanna Karimäki**, Espoo, Green Parliamentary Group
- Pertti Virtanen**, Tampere, True Finns Party

The Committee for the Future

Serves as a co-operative committee for the Finnish Children's Parliament on issues that concern the future.

Chair: **Tiura, Marja /NCP**

Vice Chair: **Kasvi, Jyrki /GPG**

New members:

Alatalo, Mikko /FCP

Asell, Marko /SDP

Filatov, Tarja /SDP

Jaakonsaari, Liisa /SDP

Jaskari, Harri /NCP

Karjula, Kyösti /FCP

Laxell, Jouko /NCP

Lipponen, Päivi /SDP

Matikainen-Kallström, Marjo /NCP

Mieto, Juha /FCP

Nylund, Mats /SPG

Uusipaavalniemi, Markku /FCP

Virolainen, Anne-Mari /NCP

Virtanen, Pertti /TFP

Yrttiaho, Jyrki /LA

Ombudsman for Children



The Children's Parliament Association of Finland works in co-operation with the Ombudsman for Children. **Maria Kaisa Aula**, as Ombudsman, has committed to visiting the Children's Parliament sessions, starting with the meeting of the Children's Parliament in Tampere. The Ombudsman participated closely on 9 November 2007 in the first session of the Finnish Children's Parliament on the National level, and in the planning of the current term. The Ombudsman was present at the session in Tampere and she holds a specific and important role in the activities of the Children's Parliament throughout the entire term.

Steering committee for the Finnish Children's Parliament

Serves in a consultative capacity as support for the activities of the Finnish Children's Parliament.

Chair: Maria Kaisa Aula, Ombudsman for Children

Vice Chair: Seppo Pohjolainen, Professor, Tampere University of Technology

Other members:

Kirsi Karttunen, Planning Secretary, Finnish Youth Cooperation Allianssi

Päivi Tuononen, Senior Inspector, Office of the Ombudsman for Children

Sari Aalto-Matturi, Director of the Online Democracy Unit of the Ministry of Justice

Thomas Blomqvist, Member of Parliament, Chair of the advisory committee of the Finnish Children's Parliament

Outi Hurme, Head of Development, Finnish Parents' Association

Ari Huurinainen, Managing Director, Printel Oy

Riitta Laakso, Head of Development, Printel Oy

Jorma Kauppinen, Director of Development, Finnish National Board of Education

Anneli Kangasvieri, Director, Education and Culture, Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities

Mervi Katainen, MSc (SocSc), Planner, Honorary Chair of Nuva youth council organisation City of Espoo

Tiina Karhuvirta, Planner, Centre for School Clubs

Johanna Kiili, PhD (SocSc), Lecturer in Social Sciences, University of Jyväskylä

Juha Kostainen, Senior Vice President, Corporate Communications and Business Development, YIT Group

Päivi Pyötsiä, Marketing Manager, YIT Group

Maarit Kuikka, Programme Officer, Council of Europe, Strasbourg

Tuomas Kurttila, Secretary

Veli-Matti Lamppu, Educational Adviser, Federation of Finnish Enterprises

Laila Landén, Head of Education Department, City of Jyväskylä

Hanna Markkula-Kivisilta, Secretary General, Save the Children Finland

Sirkkaliisa Virtanen, Deputy Mayor, City of Tampere

Pirjo Ståhle, Professor, University of Turku

Pia Tasanko, Senior Inspector, State Provincial Office of Southern Finland

Paula Tiihonen, Committee Counsel, Committee for the Future Parliament of Finland

Pekka Tukeva, Youth Work Secretary, Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland

Eero Waronen, Chief Communications Officer, City of Helsinki



OPETUSMINISTERIÖ

Undervisningsministeriet

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

Ministère de l'Éducation



OPETUSHALLITUS



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